

421st AIR REFUELING SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

421st Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy constituted, 28 Feb 1944
Activated, 11 Mar 1944
Inactivated, 15 Jun 1946

421st Air Refueling Squadron Medium activated, 8 Jul, 1953
Redesignated 421st Air Refueling Squadron, Fighter-Bomber, 22 Apr 1956
Redesignated 421st Air Refueling Squadron, Tactical 1 Jul 1958
Inactivated 18 Feb 1965

421st Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy and 421st Air Refueling Squadron, Tactical
consolidated, 19 Sep 1985

STATIONS

Dalhart AAFld, Tex, 11 Mar 1944
Fairmont AAFld, Neb, 12 Mar-5 Nov 1944
North Field, Tinian, 23 Dec 1944
Clark Field, Luzon, 13 Mar-15 Jun 1946
Yokota, Japan, 8 Jul 1953-18 Feb 1965

ASSIGNMENTS

504th Bombardment Group, 11 Mar 1944-15 Jun 1946
Japan Air Defense Force
49th Fighter Bomber Group, 15 Feb 1954
67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, 1 Oct 1957
41st Air Division, 8 Dec 1960

WEAPON SYSTEMS

B-17, 1944
B-17E
B-29, 1944-1946
KB-29M



421st Air Refueling Squadron Medium KB-29M (USAF photo)

YKB-29T
KB-50
KB-50J, 1958

COMMANDERS

Unknown, 8 Jul 1953-Jul 1954
LTC John A. Steele, 1 Jul 1954
LTC Malcolm L. O'Neale, 1 Jul 1957
LTC Ross Davidson, 1 Jul 1959
LTC John F. Yelton, Jan 1961
LTC Keith L. Warren, 17 Aug 1961
LTC Russell W. Paulsen, 28 May 1964
LTC Fain H. Pool, Jul 64

HONORS

Service Streamers

None

Campaign Streamers

Air Offensive, Japan
Eastern Mandates
Western Pacific

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citations
Yokohama, Japan, 28 May 1945

Japan and Korea, 27 Jul-14 Aug 1945

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

9 Jun - 14 Oct 64

1 Nov 62-15 Mar 64

1 Jul 60-31 Mar 62

EMBLEM



421st Bombardment Squadron, Very Heavy emblem On a light turquoise blue triangle resting on base leg, border white, edged black, a large brown and white ape standing on segment of white globe marked with black latitude and longitude lines, in base, casting a black drop shadow, and hurling a very large white aerial bomb, shadowed black, toward dexter base, with the upraised right arm. (Approved, 2 Nov 1944)



421st Air Refueling Squadron emblem approved, 18 Jun 1954



421st Air Refueling Squadron emblem: a stylized tanker and 3 receivers over a multicolored rainbow and a globe. Approved, 1 Mar 1962

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

Combat in Western Pacific, 16 Jan-14 Aug 1945.

27 Nov 64 KB-50s relieved of refueling duties in PACAF.

Representatives from television program, You Asked For It, spent several days filming squadron activities. 1957

14 October 1964 Boeing B-50D-80-BO Superfortress, 48-065, converted to KB-50J, of the 421st Air Refueling Squadron, Takhli RTAFB, crashed in Thailand this date shortly after takeoff on training mission while supporting Yankee missions over Laos. Corrosion found in wreckage led to early retirement of the KB-50 fleet and its replacement with Boeing KC-135s.

KB-50Js of the 421st AREFS conducted one of the more unusual missions ever undertaken by aerial tankers; one that didn't involve an aerial receiver aircraft. The Belgian Congo was granted independence on 30 June 1960. Immediately, mutinies, tribal strife, ethnic hatred, and pay-back by colonists to their former masters began tearing at the newly established Democratic Republic of the Congo. Lingering colonial interests, the slaughter (both real and potential) of Europeans, and fears over the control of one of the world's largest deposits of uranium ore ultimately led to United Nations intervention in July 1960. The destruction of key railroad bridges serving Kamina AB and Elisabethville AP by Katangan rebels on 27 December 1962 severed the UN's ability to supply JP-4 to Kamina and AVGAS to the airfield at Elisabethville in support of MATS C-124s on supply and evacuation flights. Quietly, the United Nations asked for USAF assistance and on 29 December the first 420th KB-50J (49-350) departed RAP Sculthorpe and arrived at N'Djili AP at Leopoldville on 31 December. After establishing a base of operations at N'Djili and temporary fuel storage (ten 500 gallon metal tanks), fuel deliveries began to Kamina on 6 January 1963. Crews simply placed the centerline hose drogue into the top of each tank and used the aircraft's pumps for pressure. On 12 January, four 10,000-gallon tactical fuel

bladders were installed at Kamina and two at Elisabethville. These were filled using a centerline hose that had the drogue cut off and a standard single-point refueling nozzle installed which matched the receptacle on the bladders. From 6 January to 6 May 1963, seven 420th KB-50Js (49-350, 48-84, 49-356, 49-390, 49-368, 49-360, and 48-125), each on a 30-day TDY to N'Djili, flew 51 sorties to Kamina AB delivering 303,774 gallons of JP-4, and 12 sorties to Elisabethville delivering 56,360 gallons of AVGAS.

PACAFs KB-50Js were anything but idle during the early '60s as well. The 421st AREFS was the only air refueling squadron stationed in the Far East at the beginning of the War in South East Asia, known to most Americans simply as the Vietnam War. The 421st began supporting deployments of USAF combat jets to Tan Son Nhut in October 1960 when 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS) RF-101Cs deployed there for OPERATION PIPE STEM reconnaissance missions throughout the theater. In November 1960, RF-101Cs of the 45th TRS from Misawa AB and the 15th TRS from Kadena AB began OPERATION ABLE MABLE reconnaissance missions over Laos, Cambodia, and portions of northern Thailand from Don Muang AP outside of Bangkok, Thailand. Customers for KB-50J services increased when F-IOODs from the 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Clark were sent to Don Muang from December 1960 through April 1961 in OPERATION BELL TONE to provide escort to the reconnaissance assets. When it was confirmed that the Democratic People's Republic of Vietnam was deeply involved in Laos, the 510th went back, this time to Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base. They were both part of the South East Asia Treaty Organization Joint Task Force (JTF) 116 from May through December 1962. After the JTF ended, the USAF maintained F-IOODs in Thailand. The 421st continued to support PIPE STEM missions and picked up a commitment to YANKEE TEAM airborne reconnaissance missions by RF-101S from Tan Son Nhut and USN RF-8As and RA-3Bs from Yankee Station in the Gulf of Tonkin over Laos and Cambodia and portions of North Vietnam from mid-March 1964. F-100s of the 511th Tactical Fighter Squadron were assigned to Da Nang AB, Republic of Vietnam, for the first time from June 1964, and after the Gulf of Tonkin incident of 2-4 August, business would have increased dramatically.

On 14 October 1964, KB-50J 48-65 crashed shortly after take-off from Korat Royal Thai AFB killing all on board. An investigation found severe corrosion in the aircraft's wings and orders soon followed to ground all 421st KB-50Js in place. Shortly thereafter, permission for one-time flights back to Yokota AB and then on to Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ, for disposal were granted. By mid-November 1964, the 421st was out of business, and the last KB-50J assigned to the 421st AREFS was ferried back to the US and retired in February 1965.

Air Force Order of Battle

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Sources

Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

The Institute of Heraldry. U.S. Army. Fort Belvoir, VA.

Unit yearbook. *366th Fighter-Bomber Wing*. Army Navy Publishing Co. Baton Rouge, LA. 1955.